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Ghandi

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Ghandi

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Mohandas Gandhi is a man of truth, wisdom, peace and also failure. Though his failure might not be widely known, we must understand Gandhi not only as an icon, but also as a man. Though his name is widely known and synonymous with nonviolence, his humanity (his ability to fail as well as succeed) is often forgotten. His image as a leader of peace, truth and wisdom has echoed through the annals of history since his death, influencing citizens and leaders around the world."

GANDHI

Ethan Lyon

Mohandas Gandhi is a man of truth, wisdom, peace and also failure. Though his failure might not be widely known, we must understand Gandhi not only as an icon, but also as a man. Though his name is widely known and synonymous with nonviolence, his humanity (his ability to fail as well as succeed) is often forgotten. His image as a leader of peace, truth and wisdom has echoed through the annals of history since his death, influencing citizens and leaders around the world.

We can use the life of Mohandas Karamachand Gandhi as an example of honesty, steadfastness, bravery and peace. His iconic image helped give courage to the Indian people to break free of foreign rule. His influence extends far beyond the borders of India. His message of nonviolent resistance has inspired leaders world wide and has influenced change in social and political policies.

In his youth, Gandhi was a shy, uncertain boy from a lower middle class family. He was a normal Indian child. He says in *Gandhi, the Man*, “I was a coward [when I was a child]. I used to be haunted by the fear of thieves, ghosts, and serpents...It was almost impossible for me to sleep in the dark, as I would imagine ghosts coming from one direction, thieves from another and serpents from a third” (12). He would later feign his notion of cowardice, by saying he would rather violate his teachings of nonviolence than fall to cowardice. Married to Kasturbai at the age of thirteen, while still in high school, Gandhi was confused with his new responsibility of being a devoted husband; however, he was in love with Kasturbai. He would often burst out in rage against her. He would

later find out that she would be his greatest teacher: “I knew that she had more courage than I, and I felt ashamed of myself. She knew no fear of serpents and ghosts. She could go anywhere in the dark” (*Gandhi, the Man*, 14).

To support his wife, Gandhi left India for London to pursue a degree in law. He stayed with an English family and began to adopt the western style of living. “It was Gandhi’s first experiment in mimicking life-styles... Now he decided to become an English gentleman” (*Gandhi, The Man*, 17). The nervousness and shyness Gandhi experienced as a child tormented him in his practice of law. He was unable to perform his duties after much effort. His last attempt came when he left London for Africa. He saw minor success, however, he was considered a laughing stock by the law community. It was after winning his first case that he had an epiphany; he began to see both sides of the coin. “He began to look on every difficulty as an opportunity for service, a challenge which could draw out of him greater and greater resources of intelligence and imagination.” (*Gandhi, The Man*, 22)

Gandhi began devoting the majority of his time to community service. It was at this time that Gandhi began to shape a lifestyle he would live for the rest of his life. “Just as one must not receive, so must one not possess anything which one does not really need...In observing this principle one is led to a progressive simplification of one’s life” (*Gandhi, The Man*, 30). In South Africa Gandhi created an ambulance corps to care for wounded Zulu soldiers defending their homes from the British.

It was one fateful train ride that forever changed Gandhi’s perception of violence. Gandhi was kicked off a train in Maritzburg because he was an Indian in a first class seat. It was that cold night in the Maritzburg station that Gandhi began meditating on the

notion of nonviolence. From this moment Gandhi pursued a life of freedom and a political protestor.

Gandhi was killed by a gunshot, fired by a young Hindu radical on January 30, 1948. People gathered from around the world to celebrate and mourn the death of one of the worlds greatest leaders. Mohandas Gandhi, long before his death, was appreciated by his followers. They named him Mahatma, or the “Great Soul.”

Through Gandhi’s example, a servile nation liberated itself to become independent and self-sustaining. Discipline was one of Gandhi’s creeds. One has to take leave of “passions” in order to free oneself from the spirit of retaliation. For Gandhi, it was a battle between right and wrong. He deplored the slavishness his country was forced to endure by an imposing ruler. In Africa and India, it was a civil resistance battle for right and wrong. His methods and philosophies influenced a country to break free of its shackles and to do it by non-violent means.

Gandhi lived and taught by the principles of *Satya* (love and truth), *agraha* (firmness), and *ahimsa* (non-violence). Defining these terms is paramount to understanding the teachings of Gandhi. His most widely known philosophy is *Satyahimsa*, the combination of seeking love and truth through non-violence. *Ahimsa* therefore is the means by which to find *Satya*, or truth and love. He says in book, *The Words of Gandhi*, “*Ahimsa* is the means; Truth is the end” (47). Love (*ahimsa*) governs family and until our nations and all of humanity embrace each other as family, we cannot love on this higher level. “Nations can be called civilized only to the extent that they obey this law [of family]” (*World Without Violence*, 20).

Ahimsa is a part of the soul and should dissolve into every facet of life. We must live in a non-violent way if we have accepted it into our innermost selves. However, *ahimsa* has to pervade one's life as a whole; one cannot accept *ahimsa* in one compartment of a person's life and not another. We cannot be non-violent in a socio-political setting and refer to violence in our family. This would be setting many rules for ourselves when there should only be one rule—the rule of non-violence in every aspect of our lives. “If it [*ahimsa*] cannot be practiced in all departments [of life], it has no practical value” (*The Words of Gandhi*, 46).

It is only when we apply these principles of love and truth that we can see its lasting effects (“Truth (*Satya*) implies love, and firmness (*agraha*) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force.” --*The Words of Gandhi*, 46). Gandhi faced an almost impenetrable enemy while teaching his methods of civil disobedience. During his protests in Africa, General Jan Christian Smuts became his worst enemy. He imprisoned Gandhi and created arbitrary laws discriminating against Indians in Africa. However, through non-violence, peace, love and truth, Gandhi and Smuts became good friends. Gandhi says, “It is nonviolence only when we love those who hate us” (*The Words of Gandhi*, 44). He gives us his account of his experience with General Smuts in an excerpt in *The Words of Gandhi*: “It is the acid test of nonviolence that in a nonviolent conflict there is no rancor left behind and, in the end, the enemies are converted into friends. That was my experience in South Africa with General Smuts. He started with being my bitterest opponent and critic. Today he is my warmest friend...” (45).

Though we might be faced with violence, the question we must ask ourselves is, what is more important, self-righteous justice we might place on our conscience or the

justice God places on our souls? Gandhi discusses the spiritual element surrounding non-violence in a book edited by Thomas Merton, entitled *Gandhi on Non-Violence*: “He who meets death without striking a blow fulfills his duty cent per cent. The result is in God’s hands” (46). Though one must suffer pain and torture in the name of violence, it is not our bodies that are affected if we retaliate in kind, it is our souls. Flesh is flesh and will be taken away from us in time; however, our souls endure an eternity. Gandhi believed this with an intense passion.

In his writings, Gandhi discusses the nature of pride. Pride blinds us in our search for absolute truth. It is a strong deterrent in our quest for what is right and wrong and what we know to be truth. We must denounce all pride because pride, Gandhi writes, ceases our desire to learn, thus disabling us from distinguishing from right and wrong. In essence, it is out of truth that we seek non-violence in the midst of violence, though our pride may resist this goal. It is through this humility, lack of pride, that we find love and tenderness.

It is important to strip ourselves from any pride we might have. In India’s example, natives could have overthrown the British with violence because of sheer numbers. Violence could easily have erupted as a means to escape a foreign rule. However, strength in numbers was not relevant to Gandhi. “Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will” (*The Word of Gandhi*, 55). It is weak of a person to gain inner strength when in a group. This is not the strength of the soul the person is feeling—this is an artificial feeling of power. It is the bravery of the soul to say, “Strength of numbers is the delight of the timid. The valiant in spirit glory in fighting alone” (*The Words of Gandhi*, 55).

In addition, using violence to solve violence does not solve the problem. It makes as much sense as a person trying to extinguish a fire with more fire. He who uses violence makes no headway because the more violence is used, the more we recede from the truth, the less we can love, the less affection we have.

Though Gandhi requests the use of non-violence, he stands firm in his belief that violence precedes cowardice. In *The Words of Gandhi*, he states, “I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honor than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonor” (49). He uses an anecdote of himself and his son to further this point: “Thus when my eldest son asked me what he should have done, had he been present when I was almost fatally assaulted in 1908, whether he should have run away and seen me killed or whether he should have used his physical force which he could and wanted me to use, and defended me, I told him that it was his duty to defend me even by using violence” (*The Words of Gandhi*, 49). It may seem like a contradiction, but, it is quite the contrary. The deeper meaning of non-violence is a will to stand up for what a person believes in. To either fight with physical force or run away in the meaning of fear is wrong. Both, in a sense, is cowardice.

Non-violence engages our spiritual, physical, and mental well-being. If any one of these dissolves and retaliates with violence, the others have failed as well; for they are all interconnected and mutually comprehensive. As we can see in *ahimsa*, non-violence is an inner struggle as well as struggle of the flesh. If we fail our spirit, our bodies will act in kind, and all are lost. If we mutually demonstrate non-violence to our inner-most selves and to the world, we will, as a human race find truth and justice. *Ahimsa* is a form of

freedom that we all innately have. If we all spiritually accepted *ahimsa*, “No government on earth could make men who have realized freedom in their hearts salute against their will” (*Gandhi on Non-Violence*, 57).

Many leaders and powerful political forces in our governments and communities have been influenced by the words of Gandhi. Hillary Rodham Clinton, David Dellinger, former Governor Mario Cuomo, Martin Luther King Jr., Dr. Carl Sagan, and Sister Patricia McCarthy are a few of the many who have written and discussed how Gandhi has influenced their professional and personal lives. They have applied his spiritual and political philosophies to our world today. Gandhi has done much more than change the political landscape of India, he has become an icon, a source of inspiration to peace and freedom seekers around the world and a model for personal growth.

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